# the first watch

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# the first watch

by r_astra

Summary

“What do I do?” Roy asks Jason, who always has an exit plan. Jason, who knows Gotham like the back of his hand. Jason, who can get out of anything, anytime, anywhere.

Jason, who is currently passed out in an alley.

Roy crouches down and presses their foreheads together, trying desperately to come up with something, anything that has a chance in hell of actually working.

“What am I supposed to do?” he says quietly, voice cracking, eyes squeezed shut, knowing he’s not going to get an answer. Knowing he has to do this one on his own. He—

“Hey. Is that Red Hood?”

Roy jolts upright, automatically shifting into a defensive stance over Jason’s limp body.

The woman at the mouth of the alley waves at him. She looks young. Maybe even still in her teens. She’s also pretty obviously a prostitute.

Hope bubbles up in Roy's chest. Jason knows the prostitutes here personally, he’s pretty sure.

Notes

Or: Roy Harper and a few local sex workers smuggle Jason out of Gotham in the aftermath of RHATO #25.

(Be advised: all medical knowledge in this work comes from watching The Pitt and googling 'blood loss how much okay')

See the end of the work for more notes

There's a single, heart-stopping moment when Roy isn't sure if Jason's still breathing.

"Jay," he says, hands hovering over his slumped form, eyes tracking the bleeding cuts on his face, the growing swelling around his eye. "Jaybird, please. Wake up. *Wake up*."

He doesn't wake up.

Roy's hands shake as he checks for a pulse.

"Okay," he says when he finds it, drowning in relief. "Okay. Let's—"

He listens to his lungs for a second, makes sure he's not losing massive amounts of blood from anywhere, checks his spine, then hauls Jason upright. All the medical training he's done over the years is screaming not to move him, but he doesn't have a choice.

"I got you, buddy."

They have to get off this roof. Away from Batman and out of Gotham entirely. He can't hide from Oracle, not for long.

He needs help. He needs—

Jason moans weakly, blood dribbling from his lips, and Roy ducks into a blind alley, propping Jason's limp body up against the crumbling brick.

Jason—Jason looks really bad.

And Roy—

Jesus.

Roy can't do this alone.

He can't save him *alone*.

But who the fuck is he supposed to call?

Dick is out of the question, and all the other bats with him. Ollie has never liked Jason; he might just turn him over to Batman without question. Dinah…

He wishes he could trust Dinah. He *wants* to trust Dinah. And he does

trust her. He trusts her with his *life*.

But can he trust her with Jason's?

He doesn't know. There are too many factors. He doesn't know what she'd do, even without outside influence, and there's a strong possibility he'd be asking her to trust Roy's word over *Batman's*.

If it comes to that, if Batman's already put out the Justice League equivalent of an APB on his own goddamn son, Roy can't think of a single person he can contact who wouldn't immediately call either Batman or Dick after getting off the phone with Roy.

He can't risk that. He can't—

"What do I do?" he asks Jason, who always has an exit plan. Jason, who knows Gotham like the back of his hand. Jason, who can get out of anything, anytime, anywhere.

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"Hey. Is that Red Hood?"

Roy jolts upright, automatically shifting into a defensive stance over Jason's limp body.

The woman at the mouth of the alley waves at him. She looks young. Maybe even still in her teens. She's also pretty obviously a prostitute.

"That's Hood, yeah?"

She's craning her neck, trying to see around Roy.

"Is he okay?"

"What?" Roy says, a little dumb with surprise.

The woman ignores him. "Still alive, at least?"

“Yeah. Yes, he’s—he’s—”

“Come on, then,” she says, stepping closer. “We have to get him off the street.”

Speechless, Roy hauls Jason up again and follows her. Hope bubbles up in his chest. Jason knows the prostitutes here *personally*, he’s pretty sure. He watches out for them.

“He needs a doctor,” Roy says urgently, praying for reciprocity.

The woman’s expression tightens.

“There’s one I can call that won’t ask questions, but he’s an asshole, and a drunk, and expensive.”

“Call him,” Roy says. “Please, call him. I can pay. I don’t—I don’t know how long Hood can last. He’s hurt bad.”

The woman doesn’t bother responding, just pulls out a phone and calls someone named Missy to bring ‘the doctor’ to her apartment. Less than a minute after she hangs up, they reach their destination.

It’s an apartment building similar enough to the others in the area. Old, a little rundown. Inside, the paint is peeling off the stairwell walls.

“Can you get him up four floors?”

Roy starts up the stairs wordlessly.

Jason’s heavier than him, but Roy’s pretty sure he could carry him up a hundred flights of stairs right now, if he needed to. He’s too full of adrenaline to get tired and too terrified to give up.

They’re four floors up in what feels like an instant, and then the woman is unlocking the door of one of the apartments.

“Jess?” someone inside asks, surprised. “What are you—”

“Help me clear off the couch,” the woman—Jess, apparently—interrupts, pushing through the doorway.

Roy shoulders through after her, spotting the second woman as soon as he’s through, her brown eyes staring at him and Jason in shock.

About the same age as Jess, but shorter, with dark brown skin and

close-cropped hair. One side of her face is swollen and badly bruised, with a curving split over the cheekbone that's almost certainly from a ring.

Roy should be worried about that, and he's sure he will be, later. But right now, he's full-up on worry. There's no space left for anything but Jason.

"The couch," Jess says, and the other woman turns at once, hurrying to help clear the blankets and pillows and back cushions off the couch.

"There, put him down," Jess says to Roy, then turns to the other woman as he obeys. "Ki, can you go down and wait to let Missy up? She should be here with the doctor in a few minutes. Don't tell him who his patient is—knowing that bastard he might bail."

The other woman—Ki—agrees immediately, hurrying to the door.

To Roy, Jess says: "What can I do to help? I don't know much first aid."

Roy flounders, lost in the fear for a moment, then finds his footing.

"Can you get me some water?" he asks. "And washcloths. Vodka, if you have it."

She sets off, yanking a bowl out from a cabinet, presumably to fill with water, and Roy turns back to Jason.

Seeing the damage in better lighting almost sends Roy spiraling again, but he manages to keep a hold of himself.

"C'mon, Jaybird," he murmurs, checking his vitals again quick before starting to work on removing the armor. "You've got this. You're gonna be okay. Just hold on."

Roy's had to do this enough times that the chest piece comes off quickly, his movements sure and practiced.

The gloves come off, next, and then Roy undoes the zipper down the front, normally covered by the chest piece, and starts the difficult process of peeling off the armored bodysuit.

It's not the first time he's done this part, either, but it never gets any easier to maneuver unconscious limbs through nearly-skin-tight Kevlar weave.

“Jess,” he calls when he gets both arms out. “Scissors?”

A pair is in his hands within ten seconds, and he starts slicing through Jason’s black underlayer, finally exposing bare skin.

Jason looks pale under the armor. Too pale. Roy holds his jaw steady as he cuts through the collar of the undersuit, and when he lets go, Jason’s head lolls to the side, muscles completely slack.

Roy swallows back the sick feeling in his stomach and focuses on the things he can fix.

There aren’t many to choose from.

But Jess is back with the water and towels, and that’s something.

“And vodka,” she says, handing him the bottle. “Tastes like shit, though, sorry.”

“Not for drinking,” Roy says, dumping half the bottle into the bowl of water. “He always says not to trust the tap water.”

Jess huffs something that might’ve been a laugh, under different circumstances, and rolls up her sleeves.

Roy dunks two of the washcloths in the bowl, glad that Jess thought to get warm water instead of cold, then hands one to Jess.

“We need to clear the blood away, so the doc can see what he’s doing.”

She nods, and they get to work.

As far as the blood goes, his face is the worst of it. The skin is littered with cuts from shards of his helmet: some short and shallow, some worryingly deep.

And then there’s the split skin over his cheek and brow, edges already peeling apart as the tissue underneath swells.

The badly broken nose caking his lips and chin in blood.

The deep, already-bruising lacerations that must be from the grooves of Batman’s gauntlets slamming into bare skin.

There’s no room for Roy to be angry, now, so he isn’t.

But he won't forget.

"Do you trust this doctor?" he asks Jess suddenly.

"He's capable."

"No," Roy says, impatient. "Do you *trust him?*"

Jess meets his eyes, searching. Whatever she's looking for, she finds it.

"No," she says. "I don't trust him."

"Okay," Roy says aloud, trying to think. "Okay. Any chance you've already seen Hood's face?"

She shakes her head.

"Worth a shot," he mutters, scrubbing a hand through his hair, trying to think.

Finally, he says: "Fuck it. Take his boots off for me?"

God, Jason's gonna kill him.

While she works on unlacing the boots, Roy pulls out a bottle of adhesive dissolvent and sprays it liberally over Jason's domino, then his own. While he waits for it to soak in, he unclips Jason's belt and tosses it on the floor, then helps Jess maneuver Jason's suit over his hips.

As she tugs the heavy material over Jason's socked feet and off of him, Roy yanks off his own mask, then peels off Jason's slowly, careful of his rapidly swelling left eye.

"Do you have anything we can wear, or do we hope the doctor doesn't ask why we're half naked?"

"Next door neighbor's about your size," Jess says, heading for the door. "I'll be right back."

Roy strips out of his own suit, then bundles all their gear together and finds a closet to shove it in.

The sweats Jess brings back are a little loose on Jason's narrow waist, and a bit too short on Roy's long legs, but they'll do.

Just as Roy's zipping the borrowed hoodie up over the white tank he

wears under his suit, the door opens again, letting in Ki, and another woman who must be Missy, and the doctor.

“What’ve we got?” the doctor says as he strides in, and Roy can tell from one glance that he’s been drinking.

There’s no room to be angry.

There’s no *room*, so Roy isn’t, but Jason deserves better.

He deserves the best doctor in this godforsaken city. The best doctor in the country. The *universe*.

But all he’s got is a washed-up alcoholic with a revoked license, and it’ll have to be enough.

God, please let it be enough.

“Repeated blows to the face and head. Sustained loss of consciousness,” Roy says as the doctor checks Jason’s airways and pulse. Glancing at the darkening boot marks over Jason’s stomach, Roy adds: “Possible internal bleeding.”

“How long’s he been out for?”

“I don’t know,” Roy answers helplessly. “He was already out when I found him about twenty minutes ago. He’s been in and out a little since then, but not actually awake or aware.”

The doctor grunts and pushes Roy aside, pulling out a stethoscope.

“Breathing’s fast and shallow, but steady enough. Definitely internal bleeding,” he says, prodding uncarefully at Jason’s abdomen. “At least a few broken ribs.”

At the rough treatment, Jason’s brow knits slightly. His eyelids flutter open.

Roy circles around so he’s both out of the doctor’s way and able to hold Jason’s hand over the couch’s back, squeezing lightly.

Jason makes a weak, questioning sound in the back of his throat, eyes half open but refusing to focus.

“Hey, Jaybird,” Roy says.

Jason’s eyes find Roy’s, still struggling to focus.

“R—Roy?”

“Yeah, yeah, buddy, it’s me,” Roy says, gripping Jason’s hand. “I’ve got you.”

“Where’s,” he manages, “B?”

“Not here,” Roy says, struggling to keep his voice soft as vicious rage courses through his veins. “He’s not here, okay? You’re safe.”

“He’s,” Jason takes a breath, “really,” his eyelids slide shut, “mad.”

Roy ducks his head, squeezing Jason’s hand. “I know, I know. He’s not going to find you, though, okay? I promise.”

“’Kay,” Jason mumbles, and then he’s out again.

Roy sucks in a harsh, ragged breath, and wishes he’d shot couple broadheads into Batman when he had him down.

“He needs a hospital,” the doctor says as he finishes up whatever he’s doing on Jason’s other side.

“Not an option,” Roy tells him. “There’s people looking for him. He goes to a hospital, he’s dead.”

“He’s dead if he *doesn’t* go to a hospital,” the doctor says. “He needs blood, and a CAT scan, and a *surgeon*. None of which I—”

“We’re the same blood type,” Roy interrupts. “I’m clean, and we’ve done vein to vein before.”

The doctor sighs tiredly.

“Well, that buys you some time. Get him on the floor.”

“What?” Roy asks, confused.

“Gravity, idiot. Get him on the floor, then lie down on the couch.”

Roy still doesn’t understand, but he lifts Jason off the couch anyway and lowers him carefully to the floor.

While the doctor digs around in the giant duffle he brought in with him, Roy lays himself out on the couch. He grabs hold of Jason’s hand again with one arm and holds the other out for the doctor.

If he notices the old track marks, the doctor doesn't say anything about them, just cleans both their arms, jabs the needles in place, and starts fiddling with the tubing and the pump. Soon enough, Roy's blood is pumping steadily into Jason's slack body.

"If you want him to live, you have to take him to a hospital eventually," the doctor says bluntly. "His ribs are wrecked; it's a miracle he hasn't punctured a lung. The bleeding in his abdomen is slow enough that it'll take a while to burn through that blood you're giving him, and the chest tube I put in should keep his lungs from collapsing, but he's on borrowed time."

"How long?" Roy says, voice hoarse.

The doctor shrugs. "Five, ten hours. Depends on how much you're willing to give him."

Roy stares at him flatly, and something in his expression must clue the doctor in.

"Guy your size can lose three, maybe four pints before you pass out," he says. "That's twelve to fifteen hours, max. At that point, you should be more worried about his brain, because it looks like his skull's fractured. He's got at the very least a bad concussion—I'd bet money on a moderate TBI. If he's got swelling or bleeding inside his skull, that's going to keep getting worse."

"Can he travel?"

"I don't recommend it."

"We don't have a choice," Roy snaps. "If he goes to a Gotham hospital, he's *dead*. We have to get out of the city."

"Get a car with decent suspension, then," the doctor says. "Make sure he's laid out flat, pad his head best you can, and you've got a chance."

Roy closes his eyes, fear and despair filling his throat. A *chance*.

"Stop the transfusion before he passes out," the doctor tells someone, probably Jess, "and send the money to the usual account. There's nothing else I can do."

And then he's gone.

All Roy has in the city is his bike. He'll have to steal a car. Somehow.

Without half his blood, and quicker than—

“You can use my van,” one of the women gathered in Jess and Ki’s living room says. “Suspension’s not great, but it’s not terrible. If you keep giving him blood, though, you won’t be able to drive, and I can’t —”

“I can drive,” Ki offers. “I can’t work with my face like this, anyway. I’ll drive.”

“How far can you get in twelve hours?” another woman says, one Roy didn’t even see come in.

Actually, there are a lot more people there than he remembers. Six or seven, at least.

“Not far enough,” Jess says, glancing at Roy with a look in her eye like she’s guessed what they’re running from, and how bad their odds are.

“If we can make it to Chicago, we can get more blood,” Roy says, starting to feel a little woozy. It’ll be close, but if they drive fast, they can make it. “We’ve got a base there. Paranoid bastard stocks…his own…his own blood.”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Jess says, moving to disconnect the line, and Roy drops Jason’s hand and pushes himself semi-upright, ready to fight.

“No,” he manages, vision swimming from sitting up so fast. “If I’m not driving, I can give him more. Just…Please. A little more.”

Jess stops, looking conflicted. After a moment, she says: “You’ll know before you pass out? You’ll tell us?”

Roy nods. “Promise. Not gonna make you carry me to the car.”

“Alright,” Jess agrees reluctantly. She turns to the rest of the room. “Tab, go get your car. Missy, get all the blankets and towels you can find.”

Roy stops listening. Jess’s got it handled. Roy’s job now is to lay here and not pass out.

He reaches down blindly, grabs Jason’s hand again, and listens to the rhythmic *hum, shush, hum, shush* of the pump.

*Don't pass out. Don't pass out. Don't—*

"Arsenal?" Jess asks, and he blinks his eyes open to look at her. "Feeling sleepy yet?"

Sleepy is one word for it. *Exhausted* is another. He feels like his bones are made of lead.

"One more minute," he mumbles. "He needs…needs…"

Jess's hand squeezes his forearm.

"You've given him as much as you can," she says, not unkindly. "Call it, or I will."

Roy swallows hard around the lump in his throat, and nods.

"Okay," he says. "Okay."

Once the line is disconnected and cotton balls are taped snugly to both his and Jason's inner elbows, Jess shoves a water bottle, an apple, and a handful of stale crackers into his lap, and he starts eating and drinking obediently.

By the time the other women come back, and the car is loaded and ready, he's feeling steady enough to lift Jason again, with a little help.

The stairs feel much harder on the way down than they did on the way up.

But Jess keeps a firm grip on his elbow, and Ki pulls on the back of his hoodie whenever he starts to list forward, and Nikki walks backwards all the way down the stairs, hands out to brace him if he needs it, and eventually, they make it all the way down.

Missy is waiting with the van running in the alley. It's a carpenters van, with painted over side windows, a construction company's faded logo peeling off the side, and only the two front seats. If there are usually tools or equipment in it, though, they'd cleared them out. All that's in the back now is an old, suspiciously stained mattress and at least three apartments' worth of couch cushions, pillows, blankets, and towels.

Missy and Ki switch positions while the other women help Roy get Jason settled on the mattress, surrounded by the cushions and pillows, the blankets wedged in the gaps so he can't roll or jostle too much

once they're moving.

"Okay," Jess says once it's as good as it can be. "Get out of here."

Roy reaches out to grab her wrist as she turns away.

"Jess," he says, meeting her eyes. "Thank you. I…"

He swallows hard, then repeats: "Thank you."

She nods once, expression grim. "Take care of him for us."

"I will," Roy promises.

The back door of the van slams shut, and then they're pulling away.

"Sleep," Ki says from the front. "I'll wake you up when I need to switch out."

Blearily, Roy nods. He lies down next to Jason, one hand wrapped around his wrist to feel his pulse, and he closes his eyes.

He's asleep before they're even out of the city.

…

…

…

Jason wakes up to the sound of a heart monitor, the smell of antiseptic, and the kind of miles-deep ache that means he's hurt bad enough even the hospital-grade painkillers can only take the edge off.

He blinks his eyes open and squints against the harsh, white light.

"Hey, Jaybird."

Roy.

He tries to turn his head, but—

"No, no," Roy says, one hand squeezing Jason's gently, the other holding his head in place by his jaw. "Don't move your head, okay?"

Jason makes a low, confused, *scared* sound in his throat, like a fucking baby.

Ugh.

What the hell do they have him on?

“You’re going to be okay, buddy, don’t worry,” Roy is saying. “You’re just—The doctors—”

Roy takes an audible breath.

“That bad, huh?” Jason manages to get out, voice all hoarse and creaky, barely louder than a whisper.

Roy laughs wetly, and he squeezes Jason’s hand again.

“That bad,” he whispers. “Scared the hell out of me, Jay.”

Jason makes another wordless sound, apologetic this time.

“Don’t be sorry,” Roy says, sniffling a little. “Not your fault. Ice chips?”

A grunt of affirmation, and a spoon full of them is pressed to his lips. He lets them melt slowly and looks over at Roy as best he can without moving his head.

Out of the corner of his eye, all Jason can see is the top of Roy’s head, hatless and unwashed. He’s leaning over the bed, both hands wrapped back around one of Jason’s, elbows on the mattress and forehead pressed against their clasped hands.

Jason squints, struggling to get his bearings.

“What happened?”

Roy stills, hands gripping a little tighter.

“…You don’t remember?”

Does he?

“I was in Gotham,” Jason mutters, trying to pull up the memories. “There was…”

Cobblepot, and the ship, and Biz throwing him clear, and—

And Bruce.

“Oh,” Jason says quietly, closing his eyes.

Oh.

Roy shifts, probably trying to decide what to say.

“Where are we?” Jason asks to delay that decision for a minute, at least.

“Arizona,” Roy answers. “Phoenix. Got as far away as we could, but you started having seizures, and…”

Seizures.

Right.

“What’s the damage?”

Roy exhales shakily but doesn’t argue or try to put it off.

“Big ones are a skull fracture and internal bleeding. They operated on you for half a day when we first got here, but they got the bleeding stopped and your skull’s in one piece now. Mostly.”

“Mostly?”

“They had to take a piece out to relieve the pressure. They want to put a plate in after a couple more days.”

A plate.

Jason takes a deep breath, then says: “What else?”

“Five broken ribs, plus three more with fractures. They’re worried about one of the broken ones healing right. Might need surgery.”

“Okay,” Jason says numbly. “What else?”

“Fractured cheekbone and jaw, broken nose. Orbital fractures. They’re worried about the vision in your left eye. Can you see okay?”

Jason blinks up at the white ceiling, then looks both towards and away from Roy.

“Seems fine.”

“Good,” Roy says, sounding relieved. “That’s good.”

“What else?”

“Have to wait and see if there’s any neuro damage from the swelling, and they’re expecting at least some post-traumatic epilepsy. Other than that? Lots of scrapes and bruises.”

Yeah.

Scrapes and bruises.

He doesn’t want to think about what they’re from. *Who* they’re from. Doesn’t want to remember the look on Bruce’s face, or the shit he’d said, or the brutal impact of his gauntlets against Jason’s face, but it all keeps running through his mind anyway.

He can’t *stop* thinking about it.

It’s not like it’s the first time Bruce has hurt him, but he never—he’s never gone this far before.

He never—

God, he beat the *shit* out of him.

He hit him, and kept hitting him, and *kept hitting him.* Jason doesn’t remember him stopping.

“Did he stop?” he asks before he can decide if he wants to know. “Or…”

Roy doesn’t answer, which is an answer in and of itself.

Jason closes his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Jay.”

“Not your fault,” he says, trying and mostly failing to sound like he’s not about to start crying.

“…Can I get you anything? Some more ice chips?”

“I’m good. Just gonna sleep.”

There’s a moment of silence, and then Roy says quietly: “Okay. Okay, Jaybird. Get some rest. I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

A few tears manage to escape through Jason’s closed eyes, rolling

down to soak into his hairline, but he doesn't acknowledge them.

Roy doesn't either. He just squeezes Jason's hand and starts humming something soft and familiar and only a little out of key.

Jason breathes in, and he breathes out.

He focuses on the calluses on Roy's hands, the gentle scratch of the sheets against his neck, the hum of activity from the hallway outside.

There's a bottomless cavern somewhere deep inside of him, empty and dark and impossible to ignore, but Roy will be there when he wakes up.

Roy will be there when he wakes up.

End Notes

I'm still wrestling a couple of scenes in the next chapter of red star into submission, so I figured I'd at least get this fic out since I first mentioned it in the end notes maybe...two or three years ago? Oops.

I finally finished my PhD, though, so I should have more time to write going forward.

Thanks for reading, and let me know what you think in the comments!

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by Lemon_Avocado

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